World War I Primary Sources

**A Letter Home from a U.S. Serviceman—November 11, 1918, Paris**

11 November 1918

Dear Folks:

Arrived here last night, and was on the street today when the armistice with Germany was signed.  Anyone who was not here can never be told, or imagine the happiness of the people here.  They cheered and cried and laughed and then started all over again.

Immediately a parade was started on the Rue De Italiennes and has been going on ever since. In the parade were hundreds of thousands of soldiers from the U.S., England, Canada, France, Australia, Italy and the colonies.  Each soldier had his arms full of French girls, some crying, others laughing; each girl had to kiss every soldier before she would let him pass.

The streets are crowded and all traffic held up. There are some things, such as this, that never will be reproduced if the world lives a million years.  They have taken movies of the crowds, but you can't get sound nor the expression on the people's faces, by watching the pictures.

There is no where on earth I would rather be today than just where I am.  Home would be nice, and is next, but Paris and France is Free after four years and 3 months of war.  And oh, such a war!  The hearts of these French people have simply bursted with joy.  I have had many an old French couple come up to Major Merrill and me and throw their arms about us, cry like children, saying, "You grand Americans; you have done this for us."

It is impossible to buy a flag in Paris today.  Everyone has one it seems and the old streets are one solid mass of colors from all the allied nations.  Paris, that grand old city that has been dark for so long, is now all lighted up.  Listen - my window is open - and somewhere there has been an American band assembled.  They are playing *My Country 'Tis of Thee*.

Folks!  It's wonderful!  So full of feeling and meaning.

Thank God, thank God, the war is over.  I can imagine all the world is happy.  But no where on earth is there a demonstration as here in Paris. I only hope the soldiers who died for this cause are looking down upon the world today.  It was a grand thing to die for.  The whole world owes this moment of real joy to the heroes who are not here to help enjoy it.

I cannot write any more.

Lovingly, your boy, Chas.

<http://www.firstworldwar.com/diaries/normington.htm>

**“My Boy Jack” by Rudyard Kipling**

Background info from Wikipedia.com: *“****My Boy Jack*** *is a 1915 poem by* [*Rudyard Kipling*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rudyard_Kipling)*. Kipling wrote it after his beloved son John (called Jack) an 18 year old Lieutenant in the 2nd Battalion,* [*Irish Guards*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Irish_Guards) *went missing in September 1915 during the* [*Battle of Loos*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Loos)*, during* [*World War I*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_War_I)*. It was years before Kipling and his family had Jack's death confirmed.”*

**“Have you news of my boy Jack?”  
*Not this tide.*  
“When d’you think that he’ll come back?”  
*Not with this wind blowing, and this tide.*  
  
“Has any one else had word of him?”  
*Not this tide.*  
*For what is sunk will hardly swim,*  
*Not with this wind blowing, and this tide.*  
  
“Oh, dear, what comfort can I find?”  
*None this tide,*  
*Nor any tide,*  
*Except he did not shame his kind —*  
*Not even with that wind blowing, and that tide.*  
  
*Then hold your head up all the more,*  
*This tide,*  
*And every tide;*  
*Because he was the son you bore,*  
*And gave to that wind blowing and that tide!***

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/My_Boy_Jack_%28poem%29>

**“Dulce Et Decorum Est” by Wilfred Owen**

*Background info: Wilfred Owen was a British serviceman in World War I. This poem is perhaps the best known of the WWI poetry in its horrific imagery of a gas attack. Owen lost his life during the war. The Latin in the title is translated “It is sweet and right” and the entire phrase in the ending of the poem is “It is sweet and right to die for your country.”*

***Bent double, like old beggars under sacks,  
Knock-kneed, coughing like hags, we cursed through sludge,  
Till on the haunting flares we turned our backs  
And towards our distant rest began to trudge.  
Men marched asleep. Many had lost their boots  
But limped on, blood-shod. All went lame; all blind;  
Drunk with fatigue; deaf even to the hoots  
Of tired, outstripped Five-Nines that dropped behind.  
  
GAS! GAS! Quick, boys! --An ecstasy of fumbling,  
Fitting the clumsy helmets just in time;  
But someone still was yelling out and stumbling,  
And flound'ring like a man in fire or lime...  
Dim, through the misty panes and thick green light,  
As under a green sea, I saw him drowning.  
  
In all my dreams, before my helpless sight,  
He plunges at me, guttering, choking, drowning.  
  
If in some smothering dreams you too could pace  
Behind the wagon that we flung him in,  
And watch the white eyes writhing in his face,  
His hanging face, like a devil's sick of sin;  
If you could hear, at every jolt, the blood  
Come gargling from the froth-corrupted lungs,  
Obscene as cancer, bitter as the cud  
Of vile, incurable sores on innocent tongues, --  
My friend, you would not tell with such high zest  
To children ardent for some desperate glory,  
The old Lie: Dulce et decorum est  
Pro patria mori.***

<http://www.warpoetry.co.uk/owen1.html>

**Wilson’s 14 Points Speech, January 1918**

“What we demand in this war, therefore, is nothing peculiar to ourselves. It is that the world be made fit and safe to live in; and particularly that it be made safe for every peace-loving nation which, like our own, wishes to live its own life, determine its own institutions, be assured of justice and fair dealing by the other peoples of the world, as against force and selfish aggression.

“All the peoples of the world are in effect partners in this interest, and for our own part we see very clearly that unless justice be done to others it will not be done to us.

“The program of the world's peace, therefore, is our program; and that program, the only possible program, all we see it, is this:

1. Open covenants of peace must be arrived at, after which there will surely be no private international action or rulings of any kind, but diplomacy shall proceed always frankly and in the public view.

2. Absolute freedom of navigation upon the seas…in peace and in war...

3. The removal, so far as possible, of all economic barriers and the establishment of an equality of trade conditions among all the nations…

4. Adequate guarantees given and taken that national armaments will be reduced…

5. A free, open-minded, and absolutely impartial adjustment of all colonial claims, based upon…the principle that…the interests of the population concerned must have equal weight with the…claims of the government whose title is to be determined.

[6-13: These eight points deal with specific boundary changes]

14. A general association of nations must be formed under specific covenants for the purpose of affording mutual guarantees of political independence and territorial integrity to great and small states alike.

“In regard to these essential rectifications of wrong and assertions of right, we feel ourselves to be intimate partners of all the governments and peoples associated together against the imperialists. We cannot be separated in interest or divided in purpose. We stand together until the end.”

[**http://www.historyplace.com/speeches/wilson-points.htm**](http://www.historyplace.com/speeches/wilson-points.htm)

From the Journal of William Bernard Whitmore—a British soldier in WWI

**On The Somme, 1916**

*Several pages are missing from the diary prior to this point*

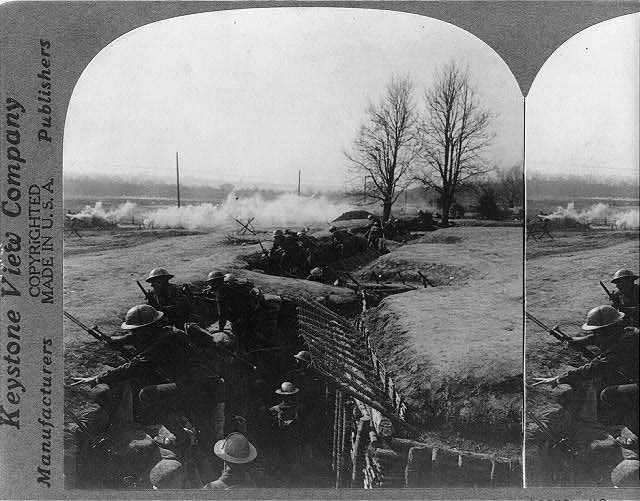
…Bray at 3.15 afternoon, Band playing in square, shells bursting all around.

It is Saturday Dec 4th 1915. Marching to trenches 4.10, dusk, shells bursting, someone says, boys it is Saturday night. Men coming out of trenches up to their thighs in mud. Reached trenches 5.30 bullets & shrapnel bursting over our heads, slept in Dug Out, lying with legs over one another & hundreds of rats as big as rabbits crawling all over us, biting holes in Haversacks for our rations. Sunday morning 8.30am men expose themselves & shell bursts within two yards of us boys hitting man in the stomach. We are served out with Gum boots, which reach to our thighs & fasten to belt round our waist.

March through communication trenches, up to our thighs in mud & water, often times above our thighs, water running into gum boots, takes 2 hours to reach firing line, only 500 yards distance, enemy firing over us all the time. Firing line worse than anything imaginable standing in waist in mud & all dug-out fallen in, two men killed in one dugout. I am appointed Q.M.Sgt in the trenches, our Q.M.Sgt Left at Bray. Heavy Shrapnel firing and enemies snipers continuously popping at us, but without success.

Monday December 6th trenches worse than ever, had no food up for N.C.O? for 48 hrs, very hungry, company came in on Sunday night 11pm. Marched over the top, machine gun on them part of the way. Six days in Carnoy Trenches, fearful experience, line regiments who we relieved say, the worst they have ever known for new regiment to experience for the first time.

<http://www.firstworldwar.com/diaries/whitmore.htm>



American soldiers ready to leave the trench

<http://loc.gov/pictures/resource/cph.3b22390/>

**Yanks in Trench with Gas Masks**

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[**http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:1919postcard-Yanksintrench.jpg**](http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:1919postcard-Yanksintrench.jpg)



<http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn84026749/1915-05-07/ed-1/seq-1/>